

Flags in the Worship Center

Some have asked the Session and its Worship Committee why we don't display the American or "Christian" flags in our Worship Center¹. The purpose of this paper is to address the question, "Is it appropriate for Chapelgate Church to display the national flag of the United States of America (hereafter 'the American Flag') or the so-called 'Christian Flag' in Chapelgate Church's Worship Center?"

After study, it is the position of the Session of Chapelgate Church that neither the American Flag nor the "Christian Flag" should purposely be displayed in the room where corporate worship is taking place.

When we consider what is appropriate to include in a room used primarily for corporate worship (hereafter Sanctuary), we must recognize any symbolic meanings of the object, and to primarily include objects whose symbols point us to the Risen One whom we worship. There are symbols appropriate for use in worship. Primary among these is the cross, which draws our attention to the cross of atonement. Additionally, we might add sacramental objects, such as a baptismal font and a communion table. The font, of course, is used to apply one of the signs and seals of the covenant, and the communion table represents a *communal* table, and points to the table at which we will all sit and commune with the Lamb as participants at His marriage supper.

American Flag

The American Flag is a powerful symbol of our nation. It is a national symbol, not a religious one. It has emotional and political significance, and as Americans it is right and proper for us to show honor to it, and all it symbolizes. However, it does not point us to Christ. While it may remind us to be thankful for the freedoms we enjoy, especially freedom of religion, the Christian church includes people from all nations and people groups. Many of those in the Church do not enjoy these freedoms. It is an American symbol. We are members of "the Church Universal." Our highest allegiance, as Christians, is to God Almighty. He is our sovereign. He is our King. His kingdom crosses all national boundaries.

Chapelgate could certainly fly the American Flag outside of the building. The school has a flag, and the church could coordinate its use, or purchase a flag of its own, but this is outside the question of displaying flags in the Worship Center. The Session does not believe a national flag has a place in Chapelgate's Worship Center.

On special occasions, namely missions conferences, we have displayed national flags from a number of nations (including the U.S.A.). On these occasions the purpose was to emphasize some of the other points mentioned in this document. The Church of Christ, in its consummation, will have people from "every tongue, tribe, nation, and people." The mission of the church is to evangelize all of the people groups in the world, as part of ushering in this great consummation. On these occasions therefore the use of the flags is to emphasize the very opposite of what might be implied by displaying the American flag alone.

Christian Flag

What about the so-called "Christian flag?" This flag is an American invention, created in 1897 by a Sunday School superintendent at Brighton Chapel, Staten Island, New York. An expected speaker did not show up, and the superintendent gave a talk on the meaning of flags and suggested that there should be a Christian flag. Someone has even written a Pledge of Allegiance to the Christian Flag. As Martin E. Marty summarized in an essay on flags in *Christian Century*, "There you have it. All because of a speaker who did not show, [and] a man who filled the empty space with words ..." (*Christian Century*, March 17, 1982).

¹ In January of 2003, this is the Chapelgate gymnasium. The opinions in this paper would carry forward to a "full time sanctuary." We will use it to mean **any room regularly used for corporate worship**. This includes the CPC Chapel. We are not stating a position about other rooms in the building in which flags might be displayed or multi-purpose rooms, such as the Fellowship Hall, in which CCA might display the Flag.

As there really is no official Christian flag, Chapelgate's Session also does not believe that this flag has a place in Chapelgate's Worship Center.

"Our" Flag

In Exodus 17:15-16, we read, "Moses built an altar and called it Yahweh-Nissi — The LORD is my Banner. He said, 'For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.'"(Exodus 17:15). Our flag, our banner, is Christ Himself. We are the Lord's and He is ours, His banner over us is Love.

Approved and adopted by Session 1/14/2003.